

DAILY MONITOR

TRUTH EVERY DAY

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 Commentary

Disabled students affirmative action still wanting

By Patrick Ajuna ([email the author](#))

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I would like to recognise Makerere University's initiative of according special consideration to disabled students by admitting them to the university including when the affirmative policy for the disabled students had not yet been formulated. In 1992, an appeal was made by the blind students in Iganga to Makerere University to give them special consideration after they had passed their A' level exams, but could not rise enough points for merit admission.

Following the university's move to admit blind students, the government of Uganda appreciated the gesture and accepted to provide more assistance to disabled students who had passed their A' level through provision of teaching materials and funding the helpers of blind students. The scheme was launched in 1995 following the recommendations of the government in the Education White Paper of 1992 and the information that was submitted to the Ministry of Education by Makerere University for action. The scheme is also in line with the Uganda's Constitutional Principle of Affirmative Action in favour of marginalised groups. It is against this background that the policy of affirmative action for disabled students came into force.

However, this policy is only limited to the admission of disabled students as there is no comprehensive policy on the education of disabled students. For example, there is no policy to support disabled students with provision of equipment they need for education, no policy to ensure that all university buildings are compliant with those who use wheel chairs, no provision for the deaf, no proper communication for the

blind as most of the information is put on notice boards. There is also no deliberate attempt made to fight stigmatisation of disabled students by the university community which may make them unable to interact freely with other students.

While doing my post-graduate research on a similar study, I was humbled by the attention I was given by nearly all the disabled students at Makerere University who saw me as the voice through which their grievances would be put to public attention, save for a blind student who initially refused to cooperate because he was bitter citing the number people who had previously sought the same information from him but nothing had been done about their predicament. He only accepted cooperate for the sake of academic achievement. This shows the level of dissatisfaction of some disabled students towards the policy.

The government has not helped them as much as it ought to have done. Generally, the disabled students are not contented with the scheme because it is not fully supportive and some of the material things they need for their

education are more expensive than the tuition.

There is an urgent need to formulate and implement policies that can make the environment in educational institutions user-friendly to disabled students as provided for in the World Declaration for Higher Education in The Twenty First Century, (1998) and the Uganda Government Education White Paper of 1992, which highlights the need to actively facilitate the disabled students in accessing and continuing with their education.

I'm requesting Makerere University vice chancellor Venesuis Baryamureeba, to take a leading role in addressing the plight of disabled students at the university.

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